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# Orientalist imaginaries of travels in Kashmir: Western representations of the place and people

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Moving beyond discussions in tourism literature on authenticity and ethnographic self, this article regenerates the importance of studying tourism imaginaries through the prism of Orientalism. Following Foucault's notion of discourse and drawing from the earliest European travelogues written on Kashmir, this article examines how and what images about Kashmir and its people have arisen historically alongside the narratives about its culture. The article examines the dynamic of Orientalist discourse, its epistemological control and consequent 'tourismification', and the impact on native subjectivities in Kashmir.

**Keywords:** Orientalism; Kashmir; discourse; travelogue; subjectivities

> I content myself with noting the fact that somehow or other the Oriental generally acts, speaks and thinks in a manner exactly opposite to the European.
>
> Cromer, Modern Egypt (2:164)

## 1. Introduction

Moving beyond discussions in tourism literature on questions of authenticity and narratives of self, this article aims to regenerate the importance of studying tourism imaginaries through the prism of Orientalism. Defining Orientalism as the Western representations of the 'Orient' institutionalised by the West, based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction constructed between the West and the 'Other', this article discusses the (re)production and (re)consumption of Western imaginaries of peoples, places, and travels in Kashmir. Following Foucault's notion of discourse and drawing mainly from the travelogues written by eighteenth and nineteenth century European travellers and ethnographic field experience, this article examines how and what images about Kashmir and its people have arisen historically alongside the narratives about its culture.

The article through a critical analysis of the representations of Oriental tourism in Kashmir focuses on three basic issues. Tourism imaginaries of Kashmir from the colonial

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past to the 'neo-colonial' present have remained essentially frozen in time even as Kashmir has actually moved from a romantcised space of the colonial past to a 'strange confined space' of the 'neo-colonial' present. The article highlights the ways in which Kashmir was narrativised and imaged by European travellers in seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth century, and how tourists continue to seek the same 'romantic', 'idyllic', 'otherness' in present-day Kashmir.

The tourism 'mediators' collaboratively strive to (re)produce and (re)invent the Orientalist imagination of Kashmir as 'Paradise on Earth'. This article explores the dynamic of the historical discourse in tourism that not only perpetuates 'tourismification' of Kashmiri culture, but also impacts Kashmiri identities in subtle yet varying ways. By looking at it not necessarily as a transformation within the 'tourist self', but as a reflexive image of how the Westerners view themselves against the 'primitive' Orient, this article explores the epistemological and ontological dimensions of such a discourse.

Whereas the 'rich cultures', 'superior civilisations', and 'ancient wisdom' of the East, according to Clarke (1997) have always fascinated the Westerners, its 'monstrous mysteries', and 'absurd religions' and its 'stagnant past' have equally abhorred them. In his highly celebrated book *Orientalism*, Said (1995) embarks on describing a long European tradition 'of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience'. Primarily concerned with French and British Orientalism of the nineteenth and the early twentieth century, Said's Orient is not only the source of European civilisations and languages, but also its 'cultural contestant' and 'one of its deepest and most recurrent images of the Other'. That is, the Orient, Said contends, by being represented as the West's 'contrasting image, idea, personality and experience', has helped to define Europe. In a sense, Said's *Orientalism* tries to demonstrate that European culture derived much of its strength and identity by 'setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of underground self'.

Said designates three important dimensions to Orientalism: Orientalism as an academic discipline; Orientalism as an epistemological and ontological categorisation; and Orientalism as the corporate institution of dealing with the Orient. Orientalism as an academic discipline applies to anyone who 'teaches, writes about, researches on the Orient', irrespective of whether the person is an anthropologist, geographer, historian, philologist or sociologist. It may not have survived in the form as it did in the early nineteenth century, 'Orientalism lives on academically through its doctrines and theses about the Orient and the Oriental' (Said, 1995, p. 2).

As a style of thought Orientalism, through epistemological and ontological control of the Oriental culture and resources, manifestly differentiates between 'the Orient' and 'the Occident'. Therefore as expected, a great number of Western writers, poets, historians, philosophers, political theorists, and imperial administrators accept this distinction as the starting point of their 'theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts' concerning the Orient, its people, customs, 'mind', destiny, and so on (Said, 1995, p. 2). In the form of corporate institution, Orientalism handled Orient by making assessments about it through 'authorised views', descriptions, teachings, and administration. Orientalism presented itself as 'a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient' (Said, 1995, p. 5).

Interestingly, Said (1995) saw this relationship between the West and the Orient as a relationship of power, wherein the West dominated the Orient by Orientalising it for its own sake. This Orientalisation was achieved by representing the Oriental through a discourse that placed the Orientalist in a 'situation of strength' in relation to the Oriental. The Oriental response to this discourse was rendered insignificant, for the Orientalist

spoke on behalf of the Oriental. The Oriental did not speak because it was incapable of speaking for itself, of representing itself, and therefore needed to be represented. In the absence of a counter-discourse from the Oriental, the Orientalist discourse through continued Western investments became 'a system of knowledge about the Orient, an accepted grid for filtering through the Orient into Western consciousness, the statements proliferating out from Orientalism into the general culture' (Said, 1995, p. 7).

Without this Orientalist discourse, it would have been impossible to understand the 'enormously systematic discipline' that enabled European culture to produce and administer the Orient. One of the prominent characteristics of Orientalism is the hegemonic discourse of European ideas about the Orient, that is the ability and the authority to reiterate 'European superiority over Oriental backwardness, usually overriding the possibility of a more independent, or different view on the matter, with a very little resistance on the Orient's part' (Said, 1995, p. 7). Such a hegemonic discourse that keeps the Oriental's self-representation out of the Orientalist discourse is, according to Said (1995), premised on an exteriority which means that:

> . . .the Orientalist makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West. Orientalist is outside the Orient, both as an existential and as a moral fact. The principal product of this exteriority is representation, as *representations*, not as 'natural' depictions of the Orient. (Said, 1995, p. 21)

### 1.1 *Orient and the Orientalist imaginaries*

In Orientalist discourse, the Orient has been described and represented with the support of 'institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles'. Said (1995) informs us about Orientalism being:

> . . .the discipline by which the Orient was (and is) approached systematically, as a topic of learning, discovery, and practice. But in addition I have been using the word to designate that collection of dreams, images and vocabularies available to anyone who has tried to talk about what lies east of the dividing line. These two aspects of Orientalism are not incongruent, since by use of them both Europe could advance securely and unmetaphorically upon the Orient. (Said, 1995, p. 73)

The Orient thus expressed was predominantly a 'textual universe' revealed by the Orientalist to the Western audience primarily through books and manuscripts. Even the Orientalist's attachment to the Orient hinged on the textual representation of the Oriental. The first view of 'an eight-armed Indian statue' was enough to cure some of the early eighteenth century German Orientalists completely of their 'Orientalist taste'. That is, the Orient and the Oriental known to the West were predominantly textual, where textual came to mean canonical:

> The Oriental designated Asia or the East, geographically, morally, culturally. One could speak in Europe of an Oriental personality, an Oriental atmosphere, an Oriental despotism, or an Oriental mode of production, and be understood. (Said, 1995, pp. 31–32)

The scope of Orientalism, thus, not only produced positive knowledge about the Orient, but also a kind of 'second-order knowledge', in the form of an 'Oriental tale', 'mythological and mysterious East', and 'inscrutable Asia', with its own epistemological and ontological existence, as 'Europe's collective day-dream of the Orient' (Said, 1995, p. 52). With this

'free-floating mythology of the Orient' the idea of representation in Orientalism achieved a theatrical dramatisation in which the whole Orient was staged to a European audience. Deep within this Oriental stage stood prodigious cultural repertoire, whose individual items (savages, *fakirs*, *dervishes*, *Gentiles*, Hanem, demons, lechers, picturesque, lethargic, etc.) evoked a fabulously rich world, half-imagined, half-known. For Said (1995), this repertoire nourished the Western imagination and structured the Orientalist imaginaries.

## 2. Tourism imaginaries and tourismification: a review

Within the Orientalist paradigm, Western imaginaries can hence be described as systems of the Orientalist representations of the Orient, institutionally defined, authorised, and administered with the support of a systematic growing knowledge, which is reinforced through the colonial encounter as well as by the 'widespread interest in the alien and unusual' (Said, 1995). This interest and the knowledge was explored and exploited with the development of the sciences of ethnology, comparative anatomy, philology, and history, along with an enormous body of literature produced by novelists, poets, translators, and gifted travellers. These imaginaries represent possible worlds that are different from the actual world and are tied in to projects to alter it in particular directions (Goankar & Lee, 2002; Salazar, 2009).

Tourism imaginaries can be described as the Orientalised systems of representation premised on a tourism discourse that largely (re)produces a Western vision of the Oriental 'otherness' existing in an uneven exchange between the tourist and the toured. Orientalist tourism imaginaries analyse, evaluate, reconstruct, and distribute Oriental lives, cultures, histories, and customs into categories that do not bear any correspondence with the 'real' Orient but with its (West's) 'own consistent ideas about the Orient' (Pratt, 1992; Said, 1995; Salazar, 2009). Travel narratives inspired by the Orientalist tourism imaginaries work towards the elaboration of not only geographic, aesthetic, economic, historical, and cultural distinctions between the West and the East, but also 'control, manipulate and incorporate what is manifestly a different, alternative and novel world' (Said, 1995, p. 12).

Tourism in the so-called third world has been examined by many researchers within the framework of tourism imaginaries and is often seen leading to the 'tourismification' of subaltern life. Tourists from the Western cultures travel with their cultural aesthetics, prejudices, and the images of textual categorisation to the 'exotic', 'unfamiliar' destinations to prove these 'canonical' musty truths and in the event trigger 'a socio-cultural and socio-economic process by which society and its environment have been turned into spectacles, attractions, playgrounds, and consumption sites' (Salazar, 2009, p. 49; Wang, 2000, p. 197). This process, which is called 'tourismification', for Picard (1996) proceeds from within a society, by altering the way the society perceives itself. For Salazar (2009), however, tourism to these 'third world' destinations and the associated imaginaries not only alter the subjective identities and lifestyles of the communities, but also contribute to the (re)shaping of their cultures.

It would be interesting to examine the varying degrees of identity transformation within tourism communities in terms of their proximity to tourist zones and involvement in tourism (re)production. There are other tourism studies (Van der Duim, Peters, & Wearing, 2005) which discuss how tourism could lead to a resurgence of local ethnic identities and competing cultural discourses, therefore pointing towards tourism destinations as spaces of contestation between various stakeholders. 'Tourismification' in such a perspective is thus not only seen as a system of representation, but a dynamic of power relations revolving

around 'contestation, reification and recognition' (Coleman & Crang, 2002; Hall & Tucker, 2004).

Within the Orientalist imaginary framework, the relations of power, of contestation, and of exchange work towards the dominance of the Western cultural forms. The relationship between the Orient and the Occident is a relationship of power, of domination, where Occidental has been historically foreign, 'male', comparatively wealthy, and reasoned, so much so that a dominant Western tourism discourse, which (re)produces and sustains European superiority over Oriental backwardness, overrides the possibility of a subaltern discourse with any resistance on the Orient's part. Within such a space of contestation between the dominant West and the dominated East, the Oriental works (often unconsciously) towards the reproduction and sustenance of a dominant (western) principle of 'vision and division' by legitimising Oriental backwardness as natural rather than arbitrary, thus participating in what Bourdieu (1984) calls 'symbolic violence' – subjugation of self.

This does not, however, mean that there is no scope for a subaltern discourse to subvert the so-called legitimate system of vision and division, which the Orientalist system of representation has perpetuated. This article tries to demonstrate that Orientalist tourism imaginaries have historically reproduced the Orientalist system of representations, rather than contributing towards its subversion. This article argues that 'tourismification' in the Orient can better be understood as an important instrument towards the reproduction and conservation of the Orientalist system of representations, hierarchy, and categorisation. That is perhaps why tourism discourse in the Maasai communities still continues 'to present the colonial images and stereotypes concerning the Maasai as a backward community that provide additional anecdotes to western tourists who are keen on exoticism and adventure in the manner of the early European explorers' (Salazar, 2009, pp. 59–64).

Whereas these dominant narratives of a hegemonic tourist discourse – usually marketed in tourism brochures, travel magazines, and advertising – describe the Oriental as 'primitive', 'immobile', and 'incapable of learning and change', the tourist 'self' is promised a complete transformation during a brief spell of the tourist encounter. The discourse therefore serves to 'fix the Other in a timeless present', with an ontologically stable existence, without a conscious self, and thus reduced by the Orientalist text to mere 'signs of themselves' (Bruner, 1991, pp. 239–240; Fabian, 1983; Lyotard, 1979; Pratt, 1985, p. 120; Said, 1995). On the other side, the Western tourist's pursuit of the 'exotic' Other is being conceptualised as a 'quest for authenticity' (MacCannell, 1976).

Bruner (1991) demonstrates that the concept of authenticity, which is primarily based on the 'myth of European decadence', mystifies rather than clarifying issues in tourism research. Arguing that Western tourists are not dupes and are very much aware of the nature of cultural reproductions in tourism, and do realise the constructionist character of native performances in tourist encounters. We do not, however, learn from his observations as to why the Western tourists would want to see the Orient frozen in the present when it no longer exists in real, and encourage such theatrical representations? He instead does give us some understanding of why the Oriental ends up working towards the reproduction of the dominant occidental tourism discourse:

> Native peoples are not merely passive beings, who accept whatever is presented to them, and they actively respond to the dominant tourist narrative, but their room to maneuver is limited. (Bruner, 1991, p. 241)

Bruner finds the limitations of manoeuvring among natives in the power relations between the Western culture and the native culture, which places the wealthy Western tourist in a dominant position. In the 'real' native experiences, however, Bruner (1991)

does mention the existence of internal dilemmas within the native mind, their 'actual' experiences, struggles, resistance, and stories, which remain suppressed and unexploited against the hegemonic Western discourse and strength. It is these internal dilemmas, actual experiences, and the internal struggles within the Oriental that need to be retrieved, interpreted, and examined rather than merely analysing the cultural performances they participate in during a tourist encounter. Here Taussig's (2002) concept of 'epistemological murk' and 'ontological murk' serve a crucial link between 'native performances' and 'native experiences' in tourist encounters.

## 3. Orientalist imaginaries of Kashmir is Kashmir for the West

*Who has not heard of the vale of Cashmere,*

*With its roses the brightest that earth ever gave,*

*Its temples, and grottos, and fountains as clear*

*As the love-lighted eyes that hang over their wave?*

Thomas Moore (1812), *Lalla Rookh: The Oriental Poem*

Thomas Moore never set foot in Kashmir. Nevertheless, *Lalla Rookh: An Oriental Romance*, his classic poem of Oriental romance, intrigue, and mystery, provided a canvas upon which future European travellers to Kashmir painted their narratives. We may hardly ever know if their imagined journeys were ever shattered by the reality of their individual experiences, because the culturally entrenched image of the 'Paradise of the Indies' was persistently reproduced in subsequent travelogues and tourism discourse. Moore, however, did draw on the writings of two early travellers to Kashmir: French physician named Francois de Bernier, who visited Kashmir in 1664–1665 as part of Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb's Royal entourage and described Kashmir in the letters which were later published as *Travels in the Mogul Empire*, AD 1656–1668 (Paris, 1670).

This travelogue is widely recognised as the first authoritative source on the description of Kashmir. The other writer was George Foster a little known traveller in service of the East India Company, who donned the garb of a Turkish merchant to enter Kashmir, otherwise out of bound to foreigners. His 'Letters on a Journey from Bengal to England…' was first published as a series of letters in 1798. Between Bernier's account of Kashmir written in 1664–1665 and Forster's account written in 1782–1784, the valley of Kashmir had in fact changed a lot, yet the accounts of beauty of the fabled land in the European tourism discourse remained persistently the same. With just 16,000 shawl looms in use as recorded by Forster when compared with 40,000 in the time of Mughals could well be taken as an example to understand how grave a situation the Kashmiri shawl-making tradition had been going through.

Kashmir was already well past its glories, yet in the works of Bernier and Forster, Moore found just what he was looking for – an exotic land, and managed to create a compelling image of the fabled beauty of Kashmir, an image that inspired many European travellers to journey to this distant land. Until the publication of those volumes, Kashmir had entered the European popular imagination as a picturesque exotic valley through tales relayed to merchants and travellers in the larger Indian cities and through the letters of two Jesuit priests from Goa published in Antwerp in 1605. These tales and the push of the British north into the Punjab generated an ever-increasing interest in Kashmir, and attracted the attention of many expatriate Europeans, including William Moorcroft, a

British East India Company veterinarian, who, with his assistant, George Trebeck travelled through Kashmir in an attempt to reach Central Asia.

Moorcroft and Trebeck never returned from their journey, but their path was soon followed by a number of European elites: the French traveller Baron Charles Hugel, the naturalist Victor Jacquemont, and Godfrey Vigne. In 1846, the treaty of Amritsar between the British and Ranjit Singh of Punjab placed a puppet ruler in Kashmir, and opened the door to European travellers. And the travellers came; not only in pursuit of Bernier's earthly paradise, but also in pursuit of an escape from the oppressive Punjab summers. Srinagar, the capital of Kashmir, became a summer hill resort for British civil servants and military officers who carved out a ground for hunters and adventurers. With the arrival of summer travellers, Moore's world came alive, at least textually.

The mid-1850s marked the emergence of Kashmir as the Happy Vale replete with the imagery of Moore's verse. Kashmir was not simply a respite from life on the plains but became a place of romance, and for displaced Europeans, the 'Eastern' equivalent of 'Western' places of leisure: 'Venice of the East', 'Playground of the East', and the 'Switzerland of the East'.

## 4. Narratives of the Orientalist encounters in Kashmir

In the travel narrative, as the narrator's trots the geography of a distant land, his advance is regularly interrupted or prolonged by the textual division of the toured culture into a variety of aspects and categories, thus dividing observations of an unfamiliar culture into a form recognisable to the reader. These categorisations of the cultural forms correspond to conceptual categorisations imposed by the author on Oriental societies. This procedure of categorisation is an offshoot of the Western epistemological grid that had started developing in the Orientalist tradition by the seventeenth century and such categorisations demonstrate the procedure of approximation needed to represent.

Most of the travel narratives on Kashmir follow almost a similar pattern in this respect. Discourse often starts with a mythological, romanticised, awe-inspiring description of its landscape, temperate climate, its lakes and watercourses, its meadows and valleys, and the lakes and floating gardens. It is in the description of its picturesque mountains, their 'mysteriously black gorges', its 'striking valleys in clear mornings and evening' and its 'immense *chinnars*', 'crystal clear lakes', and 'floating gardens' that Western obsession with Oriental romance is laid bare. Kashmir in its natural attire, bewitches, captivates, and mesmerises the European traveller. It reminds *him* of 'paradise', of 'Venice', of 'Pyrenees', and of 'English country side'. The narratives gradually advance to the people, more specifically to their physical appearances, their dresses, their character, their religions, and their rituals. The disappointment abruptly replaces the amazement. Almost all European travellers are unanimous and vociferous about their observations regarding each of these native cultural traits. The dress, the character, the hygiene, and the religious rituals have been dealt with in detail and no general disagreements can be found among the discourse spanning almost three centuries. Two contrasting observations appear in the end – on the one side is the terrestrial paradise of Indies proving in every natural aspect Moor's imagination; while on the other side are the 'most wretched, degraded people inhabiting this paradise'. It is very interesting to see that it is the 'Kashmiri men' who have been chosen to embody these generalisations and approximations. The female, the Oriental woman, as the Orientalists would prefer to call her has all the beauty, the physique, and the charm that position her in harmony with the natural beauty of the surrounding landscape. Some of the

specific characters that constitute the typical cultural repertoire of Kashmir as Oriental, and from which all Orientals travellers draw their discourse, are *Hanjis* or the boatmen, the Shepherdess, the *fakirs* or *derweshs*, the *Kashmirian* women, the *Naach Girls*, the Kashmiri merchant, and local *bazaars*. This article demonstrates how all these cultural items and characters, which were analysed, evaluated, and described by European travellers constituted an Orientalist repertoire that was used to structure a systematised knowledge about Kashmir – an organised discourse which was inspired by and tied to the Orientalist Project.

### 4.1 *Kashmir and the Kashmiris: unmasking the Orientalist desire*

Fiona Dunlop filed a story on Kashmir in *Financial Times* in 2005, beginning with a question to the potential British tourist: 'Given the choice of a holiday in Madrid or in Srinagar in Kashmir, northern India, which would you go for?' In the very next line, we get the expected answer: 'Quite probably you would be tempted by the latter for its scenic splendour', because, 'Madrid is a perennial favourite for northern Europeans and Americans of all ages. But somehow the image of Kashmir and its legendary lake lingers' (Dunlop, 2005). We must remember that this is being said against all odds, with most of the Foreign Office advisories 'strongly advising against all travel to Jammu and Kashmir'. Such is the intensity of desire and imagination that has been deposited in European consciousness about the fabled land of Kashmir. It is this imaginary that was shaped, produced, and conserved by the Orientalist discourse on Kashmir.

Bernier's first letter from Kashmir (ninth in his travelogues) is titled, 'The Terristrial Paradise of Indies' and claims to give an 'accurate description of the Kingdom of Kashmir and the present state of surrounding mountains':

> THE histories of the ancient Kings of Kachemire maintain that the whole of this country was in former times one vast lake, and that an outlet for the waters was opened by a certain *pire*, or aged saint, named *Kacheb* …. Kachemire, however, is no longer a lake, but a beautiful country, diversified with a great many low hills …. From the sides of all these mountains gush forth innumerable springs and streams of water. (Bernier, 1916, pp. 393–396)

Similarly George Forester in 1783 on his visit to Kashmir observes:

> It is now necessary to call your attention … to the subject of Kashmire, and endeavour to describe the natural beauties of a valley, which, perhaps stands unparalled for its air, soil, and a picturesque variety of landscape. (Forester, 1808, p. 2)

Charles Hugel's imagination of Kashmir and his observations during his visit have surpassed all earlier travellers in the romanticisation of this Oriental land. His great interest in uncovering the mystery of Kashmir for his European audience and to see for himself what the travellers before him have narrated about its charm is stated by him without any inhibitions:

> To examine whether Kashmir would bear the uplifting of the veil which has so gracefully and immemorially hung over her, and see whether the first or the last travellers have drawn the truest portrait, to reach the very limit of Indian civilisation, were my chief persuasives to pass several months in this celebrated region; and, why should I deny it? The anticipation of beholding the loveliest spot on earth, had power enough to allure one no longer young, to undertake another tedious and toilsome journey. (Hugel, 1845, p. 2)

However, in describing the physical landscape and beauty of the land almost all European travellers have resorted to an ethno-centric tradition of comparison between Kashmir and Europe, and the most objective testimony during a cultural encounter refers constantly to manifestations assumed to be familiar to the observing European culture. The travel narrator is persistently aware of the reader and is constantly addressing the European throughout the entire journey. The Orientalist maxim of the Orientalist's 'exteriority' is woven in these observations. Bernier in his desription of Kashmir mountains, recorded as early as in 1664–1665, resorts to this 'exteriority' in the following manner:

> Beyond the mountains just described arise others of very considerable altitude, whose summits, at all times covered with snow, soar above the clouds and ordinary mist, and, like *Mount Olympus*, are constantly bright and screen. . . . These waters, after separating into a thousand rivulets . . . at length collect and form a beautiful river, navigable for vessels as large as are borne on our *Seine*. . . . The whole ground is enamelled with our European flowers and plants, and covered with our apple, pear, plum, apricot, and walnut trees, all bearing fruit in great abundance. (Bernier, 1916, pp. 396–397)

Bernier is talking about 'our' *Seine* when compared with 'their' *Jhelum*, and is surprised to see 'their' land enamelled with 'our' European flowers and plants. European is suffixed to 'our' in wonder, in disbelief because he finds it hard to digest that things which are 'our' could be found in 'their' land, and that too in great abundance. Now there must be something about these trees that would set them apart from 'our' trees. Therefore, for Bernier, these fruits of Kashmir are neither good in quality nor in variety, which to his great satisfaction is not because of its soil:

> The fruit is certainly inferior to our own, nor is it in such variety; but this I am satisfied is not attributable to the soil, but merely to the comparative ignorance of the gardeners, for they do not understand the culture and the grafting of trees as we do in *France*. (Bernier, 1916, p. 397)

For Bernier and for the European reader, therefore, it is the comparative ignorance of the Orientals, against the cultural 'aesthetics' and 'scientific' acumen of the French gardeners that spoils the quality of the fruit and limits its varieties. Such an apprehension which only considers recognisable cultural phenomena as evidence of culture leads to the assumption that the studied culture is an incomplete and imperfect system.

Knight follows the same tradition of comparison in 1891 in his 'Where Three Empires Meet':

> . . . the groves of peach, walnut, apricot, almond, and other fruit-trees, mostly now in full blossom, the vines trained up the poplars as in Italy, and the scattered patches of various grain, showing the existence of a considerable and industrious peasantry. . . . A houseboat is no uncommon sight now on the Jhelam and the canals of Srinagur, the rich natives having followed this fashion so well adapted to Oriental tastes, and on some of the reaches of the classical Hydaspes one could almost imagine oneself to be at Henley. (Knight, 1893, pp. 6–24)

One of the crucial arguments of this article is that within European tourism discourse on Kashmir the idyllic setting of *Lalla Rookh* has not been matched by a felicitous history of its inhabitants. One of the most enduring dilemmas of Kashmiris has been that, while European travellers have their breath taken by the splendour of the landscape, they have expressed outright disappointment and abhorrence to its people. While these narratives and the imaginaries, evoked by countless travelogues and histories, about the fame of the beautiful valley spread well beyond its mountain walls, the assessment of its people

became the Orientalist's banal stock-in-trade. As a result, despite all the admiration expressed for the natural beauty of Kashmir, Kashmiris themselves seemed invariably to be wanting in their appraisement. Knight (1893) describes his impressions in these words:

> As a rule, an Englishman coming for the first time to this country takes a great fancy to these plausible, handsome Kashmiris, finding them clever, cheery, and civil, and it is not until he has been some time in the country that he discovers that these are among the most despicable creatures on earth, incorrigible cheats and liars, and cowardly to an inconceivable degree. (Knight, 1893, p. 26)

Charles Hugel, who, while beholding in imagination a delightful valley by a circle of mountains, 'crowned with Alpine vegetation' sees the 'same fancy peopling the land with noble human forms and fairy tales' is shattered by the 'realisation' that his imagination of 'a long-dreamt-of-fairy land' had to succumb so abruptly a spectacle of Kashmiri population:

> . . .old dilapidated houses, streets of unexampled filthiness; a population strictly corresponding with them . . .. Such were my first impressions . . . thence, as I gradually turned my disappointed gaze from the works of man to the glorious mountain scenery above. . . . The contrast between simple, majestic, Nature, and enterprising, ambitious Man filled my heart with emotions which imprinted the beauties of the first on my memory, and made human work lose every shadow of significance. (Hugel, 1845, p. 106)

Hugel was following a long tradition of ethno-centric evaluative tradition, which consistently argued for a degraded, primitive society lying frozen in time, incapable of change; incapable not because they do not want to, they cannot. A sense of paradise lost and bestowed on the wrong people became prevalent in European discourse about Kashmir. Invariably most of these travelogues open with the same panoramic perspective as depicted above, eventually zooming in on the details; the houses, the culture, the society, in short on what the inhabitants had made of their surroundings.

In all these discourses here, and almost invariably, Kashmir and Kashmiris seemed mismatched. The latter were described as lying, 'despicable creatures' prone to 'a whining and cringing manner', who had generally made a mess of the paradise they were blessed with. This, in turn, provided the justification for turning the gaze away from Kashmiris and focusing once more on the landscape of Kashmir, which was God-given and majestic, and for which its people needed to be given no credit.

Moorcroft and Trebeck's (1837) representation, for example, finds companionship in racist and Orientalist travel writing up to and beyond partition:

> in character the Kashmiri is selfish, superstitious, ignorant, supple, intriguing, dishonest and false: he has great ingenuity as a mechanic, and a decided genius for manufactures and commerce, but his transactions are always conducted in a fraudulent spirit, equaled only by the effrontery with which he faces detection. The vices of the Kashmirian I cannot help considering, however, as the effects of his political condition, rather than his nature, and conceive that it would not be difficult to transform him into a very different being. (p. 129)

These traits, however, were seen to be open to improvement through the moral influence and beneficence of a superior race, one with the capacity to provide a moral education and the intelligence to develop the resources of the state. Within the ideological representations of many European's, Kashmir, then, also 'became a space of redemption', and 'missionary endeavors in Kashmir on for the development of resources and infrastructure toward the moral development of the people' find an important place in the early twentieth-century European tourism discourse (MacDonald, 2003, p. 2).

Henry Lawrence, agent to the governor-general in Punjab, visiting Kashmir in 1846, found it easy to see much merit in the French traveller Victor Jacquemont's description of it as ' an ugly picture in a magnificent frame'.

Even in describing visual phenomena such as physical features or dress, the most objective testimony refers constantly to manifestations assumed to be familiar to an observing culture. For example, Hugel's descriptions of the physical features of Kashmiris and their dress give them a Jewish identity and gives birth to a never ending myth of 'Jews of Kashmir' which still reverberates within tourism imaginaries.

> Whoever has once seen this race of men, will never fail to recognize them by their white skin, their clear though colourless complexion, their long, projecting, almost Jewish features, with dark brown or black hair and beard, which distinctly point them out. The dress of the common people merely consists of a white woolen shirt, open in front, with long sleeves; a cloth hanging down from the head behind, completes this ungraceful and generally very dirty costume. (Hugel, 1845, p. 55)

Bernier long before Hugel makes a more detailed statement about the Jewish origin of Kashmiris. In his reply to the inquiry concerning *Jews*, by *Thevenot*, Bernier describes the signs suggesting the presence of *Judaism* in Kashmir:

> Their countenance and manner, and that indescribable peculiarity which enables a traveller to distinguish the inhabitants of different nations, all seemed to belong to that ancient people . . . the prevalence of the name of *Mousa*, which means Moses, among the inhabitants. . .. (Bernier, 1916, p. 430)

While there appears to Bernier that certain similarities between the Kashmiris and Jews and their direct linking to the past is a clear distortion and of the beliefs, practices, and the sociological history of both Kashmiris and Jews. With such generalisations and assimilations, the historical development of a society is misrepresented by attributing the creation of its traditions and customs to cultures more familiar to Europeans. Such an assumption of similarity of newly encountered phenomena with already known cultural phenomena was an extremely frequent procedure of the early Orientalist discourse.

The similar assumptions have been made by most of the European travellers regarding *Pirs*, *Fakirs*, and *Derweshes* in Kashmir. In all such narratives, therefore, the feasibility of actual representation must be called into question, as the natives are misrepresented in the absence of an equally stronger counter-discourse. Just because the subaltern narrative cannot penetrate the epistemological grid that separates the Orient from the Oriental knowledge, the misrepresentations live as imaginaries. That 's perhaps why Kashmir has been witnessing not only a constant influx of Israeli tourists ever since this myth entered the tourist discourse, new myths and notions are constructed to substantiate an already ambiguous conjecture. For example, *Joo* which in Kashmir is used in a conversation while addressing someone respectable is now being seen as a corrupted variant of the word *jew.*

### 4.2 Of the proverbial Kashmiri woman

The long-fabled beauty of Kashmiri woman has found a detailed description invariably in the Western tourism discourse. Marco Polo (1254–1324), famous trader and explorer from Venice who was one of the first Western travellers to walk the Silk route to China, during his brief visit to Kashmir noticed: 'The men are brown and lean, but the women, taking them as

brunettes, are very beautiful' (The Travels of Marco Polo, 1993). Bernier's accounts about Kashmiri women and his stratagems to woo them were perhaps the first authoritative statements that proliferated European imagination as another equivalent of the typical Oriental woman alongside Flaubert's Egyptian courtesan, *Kuchuk Hanem*. In describing his 12-year journey to places like Persia, India, and Egypt, he never fails to mention the women of the far and distant lands that he is visiting.

His fascination with human form and skin, even if most of the time it was just fascination for the female form and female skin, came to a logical conclusion in the year 1684, with his on human races in *des sçavans* titled *Nouvelle division de la terre par les différentsespècesou races qui l'habitant*. His description of Kashmiri woman alongside the descriptions of women from Egypt, Africa, and Lahore became an accepted grid of the knowledge about the Oriental woman. The '*Cashmerians*' he thinks are, as well made as Europeans, having neither the Tartar flat nose nor the pig-eyes of Kashgar, nevertheless surpassed 'by a great deal' by the 'brown women' of Lahor for their 'beautiful figure, small and easy':

> The women especially are very handsome; and it is from this country that nearly every individual, when first admitted to the court of the Great Mogol, selects wives or concubines, that his children may be whiter than the Indians and pass for genuine Mogols. Unquestionably there must be beautiful women among the higher classes, if we may judge by those of the lower orders seen in the streets and in the shops. (Bernier, 1916, p. 404)

George Forster agreed with Bernier for the 'stout, well formed, European fairness' of Kashmiris, but explicitly terms the 'prepossessed opinion about their charm' as misleading:

> . . .and their women in southern France, or Spain, would be called Brunettes. But, having been prepossessed with an opinion of their charms, I suffered a sensible disappointment; though I saw some of the female dancers most celebrated for beauty, and the attractions of their profession. A coarseness of figure generally prevails among them, with broad features, and they too often have thick legs. Though excelling in the colours of their complexion, they are evidently surpassed by the elegant form and pleasing countenance of the women of the western provinces of India.

In the same ethno-centric fashion Vigne (1842) thought:

> I do not think the beauty of the Kashmirian women has been overrated. They are, of course, wholly deficient in the graces and fascinations derivable from cultivation and accomplishment; but for mere uneducated eyes, I know of none that surpass those of Kashmir. (Vigne, 1842)

Orientalism was also an exclusively male province; it viewed itself and its subject matter with sexist blinders. Throughout the Orientalist discourse, oriental woman has often become the subject of a male-power fantasy. In Orientalist narratives, they express 'unlimited sensuality', they are 'more or less stupid' and above all they are often 'willing' (Gupta, 2007). Flaubert's *Kuchuk Hanem* is the prototype of such caricatures, which were common enough in pornographic novels whose novelty draws on the Orient for their interest. In the same manner, to the male European traveller in Kashmir – who saw Kashmiri woman either in the form of a 'shepherdess, a boat-woman, or a nauch girl', she never spoke of herself. She never expressed her emotions, presence, or history. He, the European traveller, spoke for, described, and represented her in his travelogues and imaginations.

He was 'foreign, comparatively wealthy, male, and these were historical facts of domination' that allowed him not only to possess her textually and perhaps physically,

but to speak for her and tell his European readers in what way she was 'typically Oriental'. Said (1995) so explicitly demonstrates:

> The argument is that Flaubert's situation of strength in relation to KuchukHanem stands for the pattern of relative strength between East and West, and the discourse about the Orient that it enabled. (Said, 1995, p. 6)

## 5. Conclusion: mediating between the desire and the identity

Given that the earliest modern representations of Kashmir have relied heavily on Orientalist discourse, and given too, the persistence of landscape in collective imaginings of Kashmir, an imaginary has assumed primacy in generating desire for Kashmir. This image foreground's the valleys landscape, and occasionally, the ruin in the landscape; it prefers to eliminate the Kashmiri people, monuments in use and homes. The interaction between the written travelogues and other associated texts in the form of visuals – paintings, photographs, and movies – and their accruing around the valley of Kashmir as 'mimetic capital', and 'its gradual transformation' into what Bourdieu has called 'Symbolic capital' paved way for the 'tourismification' of Kashmir as a space of cultural (re)production and (re)consumption.

The post-colonial, nevertheless unaltered, obsession with Kashmir's landscape can be traced to its complicated geopolitics and its root in the ill-defined relationship between the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir and the British Empire, to the libidinal colonial economy of power, knowledge, and control of which it was indirectly part, and to the tourism imaginaries that made that economy manifest. The conversion of the Mughal aesthetic response to Kashmir – embodied in their patronising of miniature artists who captured the valley's vistas in latticed windows – through tourism imaginaries into the economy of cultural production, inserted fantasy into the very heart of colonial modernity. What complicated this entire fetishism was the absence of the Kashmiri people from the landscape, the canvas, and the discourse, and it was this founding absence that (re)produced their alienation in its colonial modernity.

'Tourismification' acted as a crucial tool in facilitating and reproducing the fantasy, the fetishism, and the alienation. While Kashmir was untouched by modernity in its representation as a frozen antiquity, far off from its Oriental environment, its European tourist spaces were drenched in colonial modernity: Houseboats on the Dal Lake, the Boulevard, the Bund – a prime location in European Srinagar – the golf courses and the clubs. The Nedou's Hotel in Gulmarg, which was once 'stomping ground for the British Royalty', was also a very happening place for thousands of other wealthy foreigners from across the globe boasting of 'lavish parties and wild whiskey and gambling-filled nights' (Byerly, 2010).

Away from the Westernised tourist zones of Srinagar, lived another isolated 'medieval' Srinagar, a city of local Kashmiri and *karkhanas* bustling with the production of woodwork, silverware, copperware, *papiermache*, and of course the *Cashmere* Shawl in all its different stages (carding, spinning, weaving, embroidery, finishing). Within the same geographic space of Srinagar, two socially and culturally distinct sub-spaces exited, both virtually isolated from each other except for the 'mediators' of tourist economy – usually in the form of merchants, travel agents, guides, shop-keeps, and boatmen – who vacillated between the two. Out in the larger socio-political and cultural macro-field of Kashmir, political history had developed in a very complicated manner. Religiously it had assimilated a complex mix of Hindu *Shaivism* and Islamic Sufism along with indiginous *Rishiyat* which had enough similarities between them, yet distinct from each other in a peculiarly historical way.

Intellectually superimposed upon this was the equally overlapping space of cultural ethos which saw two strongest adherents of *Shivmat* and *Rishiyat* in *Laleshwari* (Lal Ded) and Sheikh *Nooruddin Reshi*, respectively. The Kashmiri language (*kashur*) itself was no different and never escaped this murkiness. With its two distinct yet overlapping structural variants – the Sanskritised *Koshur* and the Persianised *Koshur* – the two ethnically distinct Kashmiri subjectivities took a direct impact. Above all three orthographical systems developed within this historical murk that would be used to write the *Koshur* – these are the *Sharada* script, the *Devanagari* script, and the *Perso-Arabic* script. Whereas the *Sharda* script is now limited to religious ceremonies of the Kashmiri *Pandits*, the other two are still in use. The tragic partition of colonial India, in 1947, into two separate, ethnically distinct postcolonial nations resulted in the 'official birth' of a dispute between India, Pakistan, and the Kashmiris (Kabir, 2009).

Now a geographically and ethnically divided Kashmir started showing cracks in the already-precariously-held, Kashmiri, multilingual, multiethnic identity. Kashmiri *Pandits* with their inherent affinity and proximity to a Hindu India started both consciously and unconsciously working towards the 'Indianisation' of the Kashmiri identity; the Kashmiri Muslims in turn, already disillusioned with a Dogra/Hindu Maharaja, felt disgruntled with the idea of India in the equal albeit opposite measure. The same exigencies of an Orientalist desire amid the Great Game and indirect British rule that led to the framing of Kashmir as the 'territory of desire' also created the *Dogra* princely state 'out of the patchwork of ethnolingual groups, and fostered a checkered achievement of rights and capacities across this unwieldy entity' (Kabir, 2009, p. 157).

Tourism and 'tourismification' provided a peaceful political tool for the transfer of this desire and its traditional legacy from the Colonial European Orientalism to the post-colonial Indian nationalism. The mediators of tourism, here too, in the form of travel agents, tour guides, boatmen, tourism administrators, souvenir traders, handcraft merchants are now vacillating between the Indian nationalist desire for Kashmir and the aspirant Kashmiri desire away from India. Within this space of what Taussig (1987) calls, 'epistemic murk' serious engagement of 'fictitious realities' operates whose 'allegorical as well as literal effect' is a betrayal of Kashmiri realities for the confirmation of Indian 'Orientalist' desire (Taussig, 1987, p. 123).

The transmission of European Orientalist traditions into the Indian 'colonial' desire for Kashmir and its persistent recycling by Indian nation, using the same methodology of tourism imaginaries and the power (political, cultural, and technological) of discourse, tourism, and 'tourismification' of Kashmir turned the postcolonial space into a space of 'epistemic violence'. The complex interplay between desire and domination that characterises such spaces works towards the deployment of 'a rhetoric of control in which demeaning colonialist tropes get modified only slightly over time; and a rhetoric of desire, ultimately more interesting, which implicates "us" in the "them" we try to conceive as the other' (Torgovnick, 1990, p. 245).

Tourism imaginaries become an instrument of this rhetoric of control to sustain domination through the 'cultural elaboration of fear', 'truth-making', and 'culture-making', 'produced within discourses which are in themselves neither true nor false' (Taussig, 2002, pp. 4–6). The manifest objectives of such a tourism imaginary in the present circumstances are: the integration of native identity into the 'national' identity; the projection of a state of political 'normalcy' and 'peace' in Kashmir; and essentially in subtle ways as anti-secessionism strategy in the garb of economic development and the preservation of cultural heritage. All this eventually not only adds to this 'epistemic murk', but reproduces 'ontological murk'. This is where a partial transformation of the 'native self' starts taking place, so that a

split identity starts developing where two opposing aspirations and desires exist in the same individual. The mediators of tourism in Kashmir are going through the same 'ontological murk'. This is in fact the desire of the native to reinsert Kashmiri into the frame that only foregrounds the Himalayas. Kashmiri-American poet Agha Shahid Ali translates this desire and the melancholy of a counter-discourse in following verses:

*Kashmir shrinks into my mailbox,*

*My home a neat four by six inches,*

*I always loved neatness, Now I hold*

*The half-inch Himalayas in my hand.*

(Agha Shahid Ali, 'Postcard from Kashmir,' 1987)

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